



Inter-Sectoral Partnering Spurs Largely Indigenous District's Economic Development and Cultural Revitalization

Comité de Desarrollo Local de Guamote

No. 21

POVERTY PERSISTS, DESPITE LAND REFORM

Since the 1970s, 90 percent of the large haciendas in the district of Guamote-located on the Riobamba-Guayaquil railway line in the province of Chimborazo, Ecuador-have been transferred through various private and public means to the indigenous-peasant sector. Small farmers have been able, through both traditional methods (animal power, mixed crops, crop rotations and organic fertilizers) and other technology (tractors, monoculture and chemical fertilizers), to generate annual harvests from this land. However, poor soil and lack of irrigation have complicated the production process. These challenges, combined with significant downturns in the Ecuadorean economy in recent years, have strained Guamote's already precarious living conditions: 89 percent of the population lives in poverty; illiteracy has reached 44 percent; and 86 percent of children under five suffer from malnutrition. Many men and boys over the age of 13 have opted to migrate, disrupting both family and community life.

A COMMUNITY PROJECT IS BORN

Formed in 1997, the Comité de Desarrollo Local de Guamote (Comité) is an alliance between 11 federations representing 82 communities and the municipality of Guamote. The Comité functions as the technical advisory board for the Guamote district, which is administered by an indigenous parliamentary council and the municipal government. In 1997, the Comité, with an Inter-American Foundation (IAF) grant (EC-364) of \$280,000 (later increased to \$285,275), launched a five-year project to strengthen and diversify production (including through communal farming techniques) and reverse environmental degradation. The Comité hoped its efforts would help prevent Guamote's further loss of human capital by, in the short term, generating more income for its residents and, in the long term, guaranteeing the sustainability of their revenue-generating activities and creating employment opportunities for the region's youth (53 percent of Guamote's inhabitants are younger than 19). But, above all, the project aimed to foster a sense of solidarity among Guamote's overwhelmingly Quichua majority comprising 90 percent of the population.

Project activities were divided into seven sub-projects which achieved the following results over a five-year period.

* The reforestation sub-project yielded 824,966 native and exotic plants, which were subsequently sold or donated to be used principally as cover in wooded areas supporting agriculture.



Comité de Desarrollo Local de Guamote conducting an outdoor town meeting. Photo: Courtesy of Carlos Criollo

By participating in the planning and evaluation sub-project's 31 workshops, 2,207 people created a framework for grassroots participation in Guamote's development, which is still in place.

* 1,200 locals diversified their diets, buying \$1,000 worth of fish per month generated by the fish farming sub-project.

* Over four years, the municipality and others bought \$4,863 worth of organic fertilizer (biodegradable waste from Guamote's weekly market converted through the waste management sub-project) and distributed it free of charge to 4,800 people.

* A dormant facility, re-opened through the grain processing sub-project, was used to process high quality grains, including quinoa, beans, barley and corn, which were then sold in main market areas all over the country.

* The cultural preservation sub-project supported the formation of a musical group dedicated to recovering and sharing music native to the region, as well as several other cultural activities during Guamote's annual carnival.

* 3,129 people, including local leaders and elementary and high school students, participated in workshops organized by the training sub-project.

ect in grain processing, soil preparation for terracing, Andean crop cultivation, beekeeping, raising guinea pigs, growing kidney tomatoes under cover, community planning and political systems.

Monthly, these activities generated 55 new jobs and preserved three positions that otherwise would have been eliminated.

MEASURING LOCAL IMPACT

The Comité's positive working relationships with the municipality of Guamote and the Indigenous Popular Parliament of Guamote have allowed it to influence deep reforms beyond the more quantifiable indicators mentioned above. For example, the Comité's intervention led to the promulgation of ordinances addressing deforestation, the creation of indigenous governing bodies, and the decentralization of local government, increasing awareness of these issues in the district and among government officials.

CHALLENGES

The project faced several difficulties: climatic factors damaged crops, a weak transportation infrastructure hindered planting in more remote areas, and lack of biodegradable waste prevented the waste management program from meeting increasing demand for organic fertilizer.

THE FUTURE

IAF support was crucial to mobilizing resources from other organizations. By the end of the project, the Comité had formed relationships with the Instituto Ecuatoriano de Estudios (IEE), Paz y Desarrollo, Servicio Holandés de Cooperación al Desarrollo (SNV), Escuela Radiofónica Popular del Ecuador (ERPE), Terranueva, Apoyo Popular Noruego (APN) and Movimiento Laico de América Latina (MLAL).

The Comité plans to continue developing the projects already in place as well as to expand into areas such as ecological tourism.



Pictured on the left are tree saplings from a local nursery farm and on the right is an agro-tourists training center in Totorilla, Ecuador. Photos: Courtesy of Carlos Criollos

Data cited herein were compiled by the Comité de Desarrollo Local de Guamote and independently verified.

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Office of External Relations 09/02